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Activities not classified by field: indicators

Report of the Advisory Committee on Indicators

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Advisory Committee on Indicators. The Commission may wish to endorse the recommendations of the Committee, and may also wish to invite the Committee to continue its review of indicators relating to recent conferences and special General Assembly sessions, in particular in the areas of HIV/AIDS and information and communication technology.

* E/CN.3/2004/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. V, para. 4 (d).

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Progress made in connection with the conference indicators

Report of the Advisory Committee on Indicators

I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council and the Statistical Commission have been engaged in a discussion on how to measure progress in the implementation of the outcomes of all United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields. The Friends of the Chair Advisory Group was asked to elaborate recommendations for a basic list of indicators for conference follow-up and to make proposals for a mechanism of statistical review for future indicators. In response to the request for a limited list of conference indicators, the expert group elaborated an indicator framework containing three priority tiers, each with approximately 40 statistical indicators. The expert group recognized that the proposed framework must be kept under review to allow, for instance, further development in response to emerging needs with respect to future summits and major conferences.

2. The Commission therefore established the Advisory Committee on Indicators (the 13 members are from Australia, Brazil, China, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Norway, Palestine, South Africa, United Kingdom), the main task of which is to periodically update the indicator framework provided in the Friends of the Chair report. Many (32) of the indicators for the Millennium Development Goals corresponded to the high-priority indicators proposed and were included in the three-tier framework. However, the statistical experts expressed some reservations regarding conceptual clarity or the currently insufficient methodological development of a few selected indicators, which often explained the serious lack of data for many countries. The Commission asked the Committee to focus its particular attention on the improvement of the metadata[1] for the millennium indicators as well as to rationalize those indicators with a view to ensuring their comparability and transparency.

II. Technical review of indicator sets

3. In conformity with the recommendations of the Commission at its thirty-fourth session, the main tasks of the Committee on Indicators can be divided in the following three groups:

(a) Harmonizing the existing framework with the indicators used to monitor progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, paying particular attention to indicators to monitor the implementation of goal 8 "develop global partnership for development";

(b) Further prioritization of the indicators, especially in the top tiers, according to criteria such as "availability of good metadata", "data availability" or "reliability and comparability of data";

(c) Updating the framework by incorporating new indicators in response to recent and future United Nations conferences and summits.

4. In its current stage of work, the Committee considered the task identified in paragraph 3 (a) above to be the most essential. The Committee undertook the task of harmonizing the Friends of the Chair and Goal indicators by corresponding the items incorporated and finding solutions for cases where there were divergences. The Committee also surveyed the data availability. The findings of the present report are based on the comments and experience of Australia, Brazil, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Norway, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

5. All but six Millennium Development Goal indicators were incorporated in the Friends of the Chair framework. At the first stage, the Committee tried to match the existing millennium indicators and the Friends of the Chair indicators, and except for 16 cases the two sets of indicators reached full compliance. (The complete list of indicators and comparisons are available as a background document.) For those items where there are divergences, the Committee came up with the following suggestions.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
11	Malaria mortality rate (T2)	Prevalence and *death rates* associated with malaria (G6/T8/I21)

6. The Committee recognizes that the indicators on malaria mortality should ideally cover all age groups. However, since children under five constitute well above 80 per cent of global mortality deaths,[2] monitoring and policy interventions focus on this particular group of the population.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
15	HIV/AIDS prevalence rate ages 15-24 by sex (T1)	HIV/AIDS prevalence among 15-to-24-year-old pregnant women[3] (G6/T7/I18)

7. The Committee could not come to a common decision since accurate estimates on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS can hardly be obtained. A substantial number of infected persons are usually unwilling to reveal their status; in addition, estimates of prevalence rates are typically political in many countries. Some experts who prefer the Friends of the Chair indicator stress the advantage of including males, as they can be major carrier of HIV/AIDS. Other experts who prefer the Millennium Development Goal indicator suggest defining the indicator more precisely to focus on pregnant women visiting prenatal clinics or hospitals.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
18	Malaria morbidity rate (T3)	*Prevalence* and death rates associated with malaria (G6/T8/I21) [Prevalence refers to all age groups and death rates refer to children under 5]

8. The Committee suggests tagging the indicator to all ages.[4]

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
19	Malaria treatment (T3)	Proportion of population in malaria risk areas using effective malaria prevention and treatment measures (G6/T8/I22)

9. To be more precise, the Committee proposes to rename the Friends of the Chair indicator according to the Millennium Development Goals denomination.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
32	Proportion of population with access to *safe drinking water* (T1)	Proportion of population with sustainable access to an *improved water source*, urban and rural (G7/T10/I30)

10. Although the Friends of the Chair indicator may seem more objective and measurable, the two indicators in fact coincide since they both aim to measure the proportion of people with access to safe water. The difference is that the Millennium Development Goals indicator makes specific reference to the way data are collected.[4]

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
33	Proportion of population with access to *sanitary means of excreta disposal* (T1)	Proportion of population with access to *improved sanitation* by urban/rural (G7/T10/I31)

11. The two indicators coincide. The Millennium Development Goals definition is the one internationally agreed and used in surveys at the country level.[5]

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
37	Emissions of greenhouse gases (T1)	Carbon dioxide emissions (per capita); and consumption of ozone-depleting CFCs (ODP tons) (G7/T9/I28)

12. Since greenhouse gases are not specified enough and per capita data are more favourable the Committee prefers the Millennium Development Goals indicator.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
38	Consumption of ozone-depleting substances (T2)	Carbon dioxide emissions (per capita); and consumption of ozone-depleting CFCs (ODP tons) (G7/T9/I28) (*Same as number 37 above*)

13. Since the Millennium Development Goals indicator is clearer and "ozone-depleting substances" are not specified, the Committee suggests using the Millennium Development Goals indicator.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
51	Protected area as per cent of total area (T1)	Ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area (G7/T9/I26)

14. The suggestion to adopt the name and definition of the Millennium Development Goals indicator is accepted by the Committee.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
54	Energy use as per unit of GDP (T1)	Energy use (kg oil equivalent) per $1 GDP (PPP) (G7/T9/I27)

15. The suggestion to add PPP to the Friends of the Chair indicator is accepted by the Committee.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
126	Adult literacy, by age and sex (T1)	Literacy rate of 15-24-year-olds, women, men, total (G2/T3/I8) Ratio of literate women to men of 15-to-24-year-olds (G2/T4/I10)

16. The Friends of the Chair indicator can be used with two age groups: 15-to-24-year-olds and 24-and-over.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
132	Proportion of seats in national Government, including Parliament, held by women (T1)	Proportion of seats held by women in national Parliament (G3/T4/I12)

17. The Committee suggests using the Millennium Development Goals indicator, which is more precise.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
138	Tenure type: percentage of households that own their dwellings and percentage of households that rent their dwellings (T3)	Proportion of households with access to secure tenure (G7/T11/I32)

18. The Friends of the Chair indicator is better structured and is recommended by the Committee, but "owners" and "renters" should be separated, which would make the interpretation much more flexible. Although discrepancies for indicators 134-137 are not addressed, several experts think that, together with indicator 138, they could cause problems. The Friends of the Chair indicators address households, while the Millennium Development Goals composite indicator is calculated at an aggregate level. Since the Millennium Development Goals indicator is rather complex, it is recommended that the Committee further investigate the work being carried out by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements on the development of this indicator and the current availability of survey data.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
139	Main telephone lines per 1,000 population	Telephone lines *and cellular subscribers* per *100 population* (G8/T18/I47)

19. The Friends of the Chair indicator is preferred since it measures data per 1,000 population, although cellular subscribers per 1,000 population is proposed to be included separately.

No.	*Friends of the Chair indicators*	*Correspondent Millennium Development Goals indicators*
140	Internet subscribers per 1,000 population	Personal computers in use per 100 population and Internet users per 100 population (G8/T18/48)
141	Number of PCs per 1,000 population	Personal computers in use per 100 population and Internet users per 100 population (G8/T18/48)

20. No common decision has been reached, since some experts prefer subscribers, who are likely to be more reliable to measure than users, while others voted for the Millennium Development Goals indicator because the information it provides is more useful bearing in mind that an active Internet subscription can be used both by an individual and by a family or a household with more than one member, and one person can also have several active Internet subscriptions. In the case of personal

computers, the indicator on PCs in use would be more favourable but per 1,000 population, although the availability of that indicator is more limited.

21. During the technical review of the Friends of the Chair indicators, some other issues were raised to be considered. Indicators 30-31 (proportion of children under 1 immunized against measles and DPT) should be thought over since in some or most industrialized countries children are immunized at about 15 months and the proportion recorded when they are 2. Indicator 39 (ambient concentration of pollutants in urban areas) is vaguely defined, its international consistency is problematic and it is very resource demanding to establish a data-collection system. Indicators 89-90 require consideration to have them adjusted as well to address absolute resources; therefore, they could be changed to "government expenditure on health (a) as proportion of GDP and (b) per capita" and "government expenditure on education (a) as proportion of GDP and (b) per child in primary and secondary school age", while per capita and per child data could be given in terms of PPP.

III. Data availability

22. Based on the seven country reports provided by Committee members, experience shows that the developed countries are able to provide most Friends of the Chair indicators; therefore, the data availability of developing countries is of greater interest. For instance, South Africa (for the time being) is not able to provide 61 of the 123 Friends of the Chair indicators, which adds up to 50 per cent. Obviously, data in the first tier are missing to the least (26 per cent of first tier data) and data in the third tier to the highest (65 per cent of third tier data) extent. Kazakhstan cannot provide 38 (31 per cent) Friends of the Chair indicators, of which 7 (18 per cent) belongs to the first, 17 (40 per cent) to the third tier. The relatively large number of indicators not available in the first tier causes serious problems. Data availability should be surveyed at a wider level to get a more complex picture. This is one of the tasks of the next step.

23. Since international standards are available for almost all segments of statistics the improvement of metadata is probably not the solution for the progress in data availability. To ensure the comparability of data, all countries should apply the common standards, but in order to be able to develop the statistical systems of developing countries they need to develop the statistical infrastructure, to conduct surveys. Statistical capacity-building especially in developing countries is inevitable and a prompt issue to meet the range of needs for development indicators.

Notes

[1] See *Handbook on Indicators for Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals — Definitions, Rational, Concepts and Source* (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

[2] Malaria mortality among children 0-4 years in sub-Saharan Africa in the year 2002 was estimated at more than 900,000 deaths, out of a total of 1 million deaths worldwide, see "Monitoring report on millennium development trends 1990-2003".

[3] Although only the indicator on HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in 15-24-year-old pregnant women is listed among Millennium Development Goals indicators, HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the age group 15-24 is also an official Goal indicator recommended for use for the global monitoring as well as for monitoring the Goals at the country level. It should be noted that estimates of

HIV/AIDS prevalence rate for the whole population in this age group were not available for the 2003 report due to data problems.

[4] To date, malaria prevalence data are not available since estimates cannot be derived from reported cases (which largely underestimate the reality).

[5] In the absence of an operational definition on safe drinking water to be used in surveys, the World Health Organization/United Nations Children's Fund Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation introduced the term "Improved drinking water sources", which describes technology types that are likely to meet the criteria for yielding safe drinking water.

[6] The "Proportion of the population with access to improved sanitation" refers to the percentage of the population with access to facilities that hygienically separate human excreta from human, animal and insect contact.

[7] As with the Millennium Development Goals, for international comparisons only the single or lower house is considered in calculating the indicator.